recipient. For example, a copy of the recipient's email delivery instructions can be forwarded to the sender. In one embodiment, the sender has final control over delivery and has the option to veto any alternate delivery instructions given by the recipient. To prevent fraud or for other reasons, the sender can direct that mail item 100 be delivered to the original address.

[044]   As in stage 215, the instruction acceptance notification may be sent by a variety of methods well known in the art, such as email, telephone, fax, letter, or electronic data exchange between data processing systems. Contact information for communicating, e.g., with the sender, may be retrieved from a variety of sources well known in the art. For example, it may be looked up in a database provided by the mailer, gotten from information written on the parcel (e.g., return address), or gotten from information encoded on the mail item using a bar code or data matrix code.

[045]   In stage 230 of the process, the new delivery instructions, e.g., from the recipient, are approved and the process proceeds to stage 235, or the instructions are vetoed and the process proceeds to stage 240. The instructions may be approved by a variety of individuals and organizations. For example, as noted above, the sender may retain final control over delivery of mail item 100. One skilled in the art would also recognize that approval of the instructions may be performed in a wide variety of ways. For example, in one embodiment, the sender compares the new delivery address to a list of previously specified acceptable delivery addresses for the recipient, and agrees if the new address is on the list.

Agreeing only to pre-defined alternate addresses helps reduce fraudulent redirection of mail.

[046]   If the instructions are approved, mail item 100 is delivered according to the instructions (stage 235). In one embodiment consistent with the principles of the present invention, if the recipient has specified a new delivery point, a distinctive new label specifying the new address may be produced and affixed to mail item 100 in place of the original delivery address label, so that a delivery person reading the label will deliver mail item 100 correctly. The distinctive new label may be used to alert the mail carrier that the piece is automatically being redirected and adds a degree of fraud prevention. Similarly, the delivery address of mail item 100 contained in database 125 may be changed to reflect the new delivery point. In one embodiment, the label and database changes may be performed automatically, for example, by a system used by the U.S. Postal Service.

[047]   In stage 230, if the instructions are not approved, then mail item 100 is delivered according to the original address on mail item 100 (stage 235). One skilled in the art would also recognize that mail item 100 may be sent to destinations other than the original address, e.g., in the event of an undeliverable address. For example, in one embodiment consistent with the principles of the present invention, the mailer may specify a new delivery point for mail item 100 in this stage.

[048]   Next, the delivery service attempts to deliver mail item 100 to the final delivery point, which will generally be either a new delivery point as instructed or the original addressed delivery point. If mail item 100 is successfully delivered, then the

process proceeds to stage 250. If mail item 100 is undeliverable, then the process proceeds to stage 260.

[049]   Mail item 100 may be undeliverable for any number of reasons well known to those of ordinary skill in the art. For example, the address may be invalid, the recipient may have moved, or nobody may have been home to accept the parcel during several redelivery and notification attempts.

[050]   If mail item 100 is successfully delivered, then in stage 250 a notification is sent to indicate that actual delivery has occurred. As with stages 215 and 225, the delivery notification may be sent to a variety of individuals or organizations, e.g., the sender, and may be done in a number of different ways, all consistent with the principles of the present invention. For example, as is known in the art, the delivery person may scan the identification barcode on mail item 100 when he places mail item 100 in the recipient's home mailbox. An internal clock in the scanner records the delivery time. When the scanner is then placed in a cradle in the delivery truck or at the local office, the delivery information is uploaded to a computer and placed in a database accessible to those trying to find delivery information for that item. Accordingly, the sender could confirm delivery using a "tracking number" and a website to access the database and learn the delivery information. The sender could then make that information available on the sender's website, so that a recipient customer of the sender could access it without knowing what shipping service was used, the "tracking number," or any other details. As is known to those skilled in the art, the notification confirming delivery, using any of a number of methods, some of which were previously described.